The Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies
STRATEGIC DATALINK
de L'Institut Canadien D'Études Stratégiques

MARITIME STRATEGIES DOWN UNDER: LESSONS FOR CANADA?

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Strategic Datalink #121
August, 2004

Introduction

The Canadian navy stands at a critical juncture. Recent news stories (since denied by high-ranking officials) warning of the loss of capital ships illustrate the degree to which the navy's future is marked by uncertainty.[1]

Decisions taken in the next few years will determine the types of naval capabilities that will be at the disposal of the Government of Canada well into the 21st century. If the current government is unwilling to articulate Canada's domestic and international maritime security interests, the Canadian navy will, very soon and by default, be reduced to the status of a largely coastal/offshore protection force, with only symbolic international importance.

This is occurring at a time when the 'war on terror' and continental securiy have elevated the importance of security and defence issues for Canada and her main allies. The April 2004, National Security Policy noted that "Protecting Canada and the safety and security of Canadians at home and abroad", particularly against the evolving terrorist threat, was the number one Canadian security priority. Yet, in October of 2003, a study by the Senate Standing Committee on National Security and Defence found that "Canada's coasts are virtually undefended".[2] The report exposed significant gaps in the country's offshore and coastal security which potentially leave Canada vulnerable.

This not only has profound implications for Canada's vulnerability to terrorist attack, it also impacts on all aspects of Canada's relations with the United States. An American perception that Canada is not adequately seeing to its own defence, the joint defence of North America, or the collective defence of the Western community of nations, creates a potentially negative impression of Canada as a security burden that the US must bear.

Recently, both Australia and New Zealand have confronted similar dilemmas. This paper compares the naval posture of Canada with that of Australia and New Zealand, and assesses whether, and to what degree, either country's approach can serve as a possible model for the future of the Canadian navy. It assesses what the political and strategic prerequisites may be for the adoption of either model by Canada. Lastly, it addresses the likely political and strategic consequences if Canada adopts one or the other of these models.

The Canadian Navy (2004)

The overarching reality driving Canadian defence policy today is the steady erosion of key military capabilities due to inadequate or misdirected funding over the past decade. Several core naval capabilities are now at risk, potentially affecting the security of Canada's maritime approaches and its ability to participate in multinational naval operations.

Coastal/Offshore Sovereignty Protection: As the Senate National Security and Defence Committee recently found, the defence of Canada's territorial waters and coastline against unauthorized incursions by smugglers, foreign fishing fleets, and other malefactors is seriously under-resourced. Part of the problem is that the Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) has few powers of law enforcement. In addition, its ships are almost entirely unarmed and its ageing fleet is not ideally suited to security patrols.

Both the navy and the coast guard are now examining options for acquiring new offshore patrol vessels to police Canadian waters. At present, the navy has few assets well suited for this role. The 12 Maritime Coastal Defence Vessels (MCDVs) are used primarily for reserve training, while the three destroyers and 12 frigates are too sophisticated and manpower-intensive to be used cost effectively for non-traditional security tasks. The numbers of shore-based maritime patrol aircraft, and their flying hours, have been drastically cutback over the past decade.[3] All of this restricts the government's ability to ensure the security of Canada's territorial waters.

Some measures to partially rectify these shortcomings are in the offing. The surveillance and control of coastal areas will receive a boost from the entry into service of the four *Victoria*-class submarines, the High Frequency Surface Wave Radar (HFSWR) network, and an additional $308-million announced in the April, 2004 federal budget for strengthening marine security. Closer co-ordination and information-sharing between the navy, coastal guard, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and US maritime authorities will be fostered. However, it is certain that additional measures (such as new patrol vessels, more comprehensive air surveillance and better port security) will be

needed in order to protect Canada's portion of the sea approaches to the North American continent.

'Blue water' capabilities: For the past 50 years, the Canadian navy has maintained the capability to serve overseas in support of allied objectives. The ability to deploy and sustain a naval task group represents the essence of Canada's expeditionary naval capability. *Leadmark*, the navy's strategy planning document, describes a naval task group as:

> the task-tailored mix of capabilities brought together in a variety of surface, sub-surface and aerial platforms. The defining characteristics of a naval task group are precisely those that the Canadian Forces have identified as fundamental to the concept of tactically self-sufficient units.[4]

Retaining a naval task group capability enables the Government of Canada to make effective, self-sufficient and politically visible contributions to coalition operations. Yet certain core capabilities essential to the task group are now at risk of extinction. The three remaining *Iroquois*-class destroyers, which provide the essential long-range air defence as well as command and control capabilities, have a hull life expectancy of 2009-10[5], and no replacement is in sight.

Without the fuel and supplies carried by operational support ships, a Canadian task group cannot venture far from port, or remain at sea without being entirely reliant on allied logistic support. The two remaining support ships are already 35-years old and are far too capital- and manpower-intensive. Two vessels are insufficient to sustain one ship permanently on station overseas if needed. The first of their mooted replacements, the Joint Support Ships (JSS), may not be in service until 2012,[6] with a later date certainly possible. At the time of writing, the JSS project was still unfunded.

Even the existing *Halifax*-class frigates, which can patrol Canadian waters, now require $2-billion in modernization of their electronics systems. This is likely to soak up a good portion of the navy's capital budget over the next number of years. Up to the present, funding shortfalls have delayed this project.[7]

Without naval helicopters, a single ship's or task group's area of operations is effectively limited to the horizon, with only the most limited ability to investigate surface/sub-surface contacts. The recently-announced purchase of the Sikorsky H-92 helicopter is good news for the military, although the 40-year-old Sea King will have to remain in service until its 2010 – at decreasing rates of safety and serviceability.

Each of these component capabilities – command and control, afloat logistics, and naval aviation – is key to the viability of the task group. As these capabilities atrophy the Government of Canada will find itself hard-pressed to come up with relevant or credible contributions to allied naval operations.

Power Projection Capability: The navy's present capacity to influence events ashore is virtually nil. The Joint Support Ship will provide the Canadian navy with a miniscule amphibious capability; its primary role will be to provide the fleet with underway refueling support and to transport vehicles and equipment to secure ports. A joint force headquarters, an "expandable" health care facility, accommodations for a maximum of 210 people and up to 1,500 lane meters of protected space below decks for the transport of equipment are envisaged.[8]

However, the entire JSS concept should be viewed with skepticism. The capabilities of the ship have been continually downgraded over the past several years in order to fit the project into an ever-shrinking budget. At the time of writing there were no similar ships either in service or under construction in any allied navy. This may be attributed to a belief that such a vessel would provide modest capability in a number of areas, but not enough in each to make a difference in most operations.

A major part of the problem is that, for the past decade, the Government of Canada has remained relatively detached from the development of defence, and especially naval, policy. Parliament has been almost completely absent from the policy-making process with few effective mechanisms to hold government to account for its lack of interest. There is no broad political consensus on the immediacy of maritime threats, nor what national interests (as opposed to values) must be protected either in home waters or abroad.

If Canada is to develop a strategic naval policy that flows from a realistic assessment of the national interest, then the process by which Canada makes and implements defence policy must first change. The different ways in which governments in Australia and New Zealand have assessed their own national interests may be instructive.

The Australian Model

Australia's strategic situation corresponds to Canada's in many respects. Both are continent-sized countries with small populations and highly developed economies. Both have also been relatively free from immediate external threat, although Australia's perception of potential threats has historically been greater.

A major difference between the strategic circumstances facing Canada and Australia is the fact that Australia has not generally regarded the protection of a larger great power as automatic. While Australia has long been allied to the US, the distance between the two countries has reinforced the aspiration that Australia remain as militarily self-reliant as possible.

Australia's contemporary foreign policy objectives were first outlined in its Foreign Policy White Paper of 1998 entitled, "Advancing the National Interest". The national interest was defined very clearly as "advancing the security and prosperity of Australia and Australians".[9] Complementary objectives were articulated to ensure that all the tools of foreign policy – diplomacy, military power, development assistance and intelligence capabilities – were focused on promoting basic national interests.

The Australian defence policy white paper that followed in 2000 prioritized Australia's interests on the basis of levels of perceived security interests in different geographic regions. The defence white paper stated:

> Highest priority is accorded to our interests and objectives closest to Australia…in general, the closer a crisis or problem is to Australia, the greater the likelihood that it would be important to our security and the greater the likelihood that we would be able to help do something about it.[10]

The first priority in Australian defence policy has been accorded the defence of Australia and its direct sea and air ap-

proaches. Several projects have been initiated to improve the ability to defend Australia and its offshore waters.[11] However, the lion's share of new resources are being directed toward the build-up of the power-projection capabilities of all three services. For the navy this means the acquisition of two large helicopter assault ships and one strategic sealift ship to transport ground and air forces to offshore trouble spots.

The navy's major surface and sub-surface combat forces are all being modernized in order to support these expeditionary forces, and to carry out routine patrol tasks. New patrol craft are being built to police coastal areas. Three anti-air warfare destroyers will enter service at the turn of the decade, and will possess an anti-ballistic missile capability so as to address emerging threats.

Political continuity has been a principal reason for Australian defence policy consistency over the years. The government John Howard has been in office since 1996 and has remained committed to the foreign policy and defence course that it charted in 1998. To date the opposition Labor party has supported the basic thrust of the priorities announced in the defence white paper of 2000. (If Labor is elected to replace the present government in general elections scheduled for October of 2004, this bipartisanship in defence policy will face its first real test).

The role of Parliament, and in particular the elected Senate, has contributed greatly to this political consensus. The Senate is relatively free of government influence and its defence committee reviews the country's defence budget and levels of military preparedness in considerable detail. Thus, it plays an important role in acquainting Senators (and MPs) of all parties more fully with strategic and defence matters. This is in contrast to Canada, where senate reports on defence and security are often ignored, parliamentary committees are under-resourced, and all power related to the budget and policy resides with the prime minister and his cabinet.

The New Zealand Model

Like Canada, New Zealand has traditionally regarded itself as relatively immune from immediate external threat. New Zealanders have also believed that in the event of conflict, the protection afforded by Australia (and the US Navy) to New Zealand would be more or less automatic.

Like Canada, New Zealand's past willingness to maintain a relatively broad range of military capabilities in order to contribute to its alliances began to wane with the end of the Cold War. Key military capabilities were not renewed during the 1990s. The election of Helen Clark's government in 2000 led to the decision to opt for a territorial defence strategy with only a limited ability to contribute to military operations further afield.[12]

Like Australia, New Zealand's defence policy paper of 2000 sets priorities based on their geographic proximity to the country. However, unlike Australia, New Zealand now stresses coastal/offshore protection over any power-projection capability. This means that the navy's frigates have not been replaced on a one-for-one basis and, from 2005, only two will remain in service. Instead, it is intended to build offshore and inshore patrol vessels, and to undertake a limited modernization of the air force's patrol aircraft. These measures are designed exclusively for the protection of home waters.

To further assist in operations around New Zealand and in the South Pacific, one 8,000-ton multi-role vessel will also be built. It will be capable of providing limited sealift and amphibious landing capacity to the army. Thus, New Zealand air and naval forces are now largely suited only for operations other than war, and only symbolic overseas deployments.

New Zealand's decision to opt for a territorial or home defence strategy is largely a product of the failure to sustain an effective national political consensus in support of a major defence effort in the post-Cold War period. Once the rust-out of the forces had proceeded past a certain point, it was politically much easier to opt for a new defence policy that simply confirmed the reality of what had occurred. The parallels with Canada are striking, as the pending non-replacement of major naval platforms looks to be the result of willful procrastination.

New Zealand's policy orientation has had a impact on its external security relationships. It has restricted New Zealand's influence and credibility in both Washington and Canberra. It has also limited the military options that the government of New Zealand has in the event of a major crisis. However, it should be noted that the policy is not perceived, domestically, to have severely damaged the security of New Zealand itself. Barring a major crisis in New Zealand's immediate neighbourhood, it is unlikely that support for a more robust naval posture will emerge.

Advancing Canada's National Security Interests and the Role of Naval Capabilities

As in New Zealand, a long-standing (one might say dominant) view in Canada has been that there are few practical consequences related to the failure to invest in national defence. David Haglund of Queen's University succinctly summarized this position:

> We are cheap because our strategic culture instructs us to be cheap. There is little risk to being cheap because we are protected by an American neighbour that is at one and the same constantly criticized but continually relied upon to be Canada's security provider of last resort.[13]

But is this still the case? In the aftermath of 9/11, the consequences of failing to invest in defence in general and in a capable navy in particular are potentially two-fold. First, that the Government of Canada will be unable to safeguard its territory, vast coastlines and its air and sea approaches against both non-military and emerging unconventional threats; second, that Canada will exercise very little influence – particularly with the United States – when international security developments adversely affect the national interest.

There appears to be increasing recognition that failing to address at least the former possibility could be very dangerous. The new national security policy unveiled by the Martin Government in April, 2004 for the first time identifies three core national security interests that Canada needs to advance. These are:

i) Protecting Canada and the safety and security of Canadians at home and abroad;
ii) Ensuring that Canada is not a base for threats to our allies; and,
iii) Contributing to international security.[14]

There is little question that the armed forces must be effective in order to ensure that first two interests can be secured. While both New Zealand and, particularly, Australia have found that the acquisition of necessary surveillance and patrol capa-

bility is not inexpensive, it is vital that resources be provided in order to ensure that these tasks - for which little international assistance is likely or in fact desirable - can be performed effectively.

Addressing the third core interest has traditionally been more difficult for Canada, not least because it is not as readily apparent that Canadian security is adversely affected if Canada makes only a limited contribution to international security. The Australian decision to invest in power-projection capabilities is driven, first and foremost, by the assessment that they are necessary to ensure that threats to Australia do not emerge in the 'arc of instability' to the north of the country.

While Canada's security interests abroad are not as evident, its political interests in making an adequate defence effort may actually be more pronounced than those of Australia or New Zealand. Given Canada's proximity to the US, the political and economic consequences of neglect (or perceived neglect) of one's own defence are potentially more serious. Even the temporary closure of the US-Canada border to trade as a result of a terrorist incident would adversely affect Canada's socio-economic health.

It could be argued, therefore, that vital Canadian political and security interests warrant a greater defence effort. The key question is how much is enough? At what capability level will the Canadian Forces (and the Canadian navy) make politically and militarily meaningful contributions to national, continental, and international security?

While the idea of 'niche' contributions to international security is in vogue in a time of scarce resources, these are unlikely, in most circumstances, to be seen as militarily important by key allies. Indeed, it is probably the case that the Canadian military has been at its most politically effective when it has been able to make meaningful and independent efforts within larger allied coalitions. What is valued by allies is the ability to augment coalition strength through the deployment of self-supporting and militarily credible formations.

In terms of naval capability, the benchmark would appear to be Canada's ability to deploy and sustain a self-supporting naval task group that is able to project power ashore. This will require, at minimum, the replacement of afloat command and control capabilities and a more robust amphibious capability than is currently envisioned. Thus, a variation of the force posture envisaged for Royal Australian Navy might be most strategically prudent for Canada.

Both the Australian and New Zealand models also suggest that some sort of geographic focus is important. Canada simply does not have the same level of interests in all regions of the world. Therefore, it is also important to consider how and where all the potential tools of Canadian security policy (military capability, development assistance, diplomacy and intelligence assets) can be focused to advance Canada's domestic and international interests.

Conclusion

Canada faces a choice – either to invest the resources necessary to establish a reasonable naval expeditionary capability, or concentrate entirely on coastal defence and offshore security, the latter task being a fundamental national security requirement. Eroding capabilities mean that this choice is being made by default. Furthermore, given the nature of Canada's political system, which has not been conducive to either policy consistency or major defence expenditures, it seems unlikely that this trend will be easily reversed in the absence of serious reforms to the policy-making environment.

While Canada's political and strategic interests may demand a defence policy and maritime strategy more akin to that of Australia, both military and political realities now point in a very different direction. The 2004 election results suggest that Canada is more likely than ever to adopt a version of New Zealand's maritime strategy and naval posture. The Liberal minority government looks set to replace some of the most essential naval capabilities but probably allow others to disappear. The inability, or disinclination, of parliament to influence this policy choice will virtually ensure that the capacity of future governments to be constructively engaged in international security matters will be increasingly constrained. Aside from largely symbolic overseas deployments, the Canadian navy will be reoriented in a continentalist and territorial defence direction.

Notes:

[1]"Defence chief denies impending cuts," available at http://www.canada.com/victoria/timescolonist/news/story.html?id=a36a41a2-549c-4c05-8fa1-4fa0d54cf254

[2]Senate Standing Committee on National Security and Defence. "Canada's Coastlines: The Longest Undefended Borders in the World" (October 2003) p. 81

[3] By 2005 the three Arcturus patrol aircraft will be eliminated and the number of Aurora aircraft reduced from 18 to 16. The total flying hours permitted for the Aurora have been cut by more than 50 percent in the last decade.

[4] Canada. Department of National Defence. *Leadmark: The Navy's Strategy for 2020*, Part Six.

[5] Conversation with a senior Canadian naval officer.

[6] Department of National Defence, *Talking Points: Joint Support Ship Project Update* (March 11, 2004)

[7] *Ottawa Citizen*, April 17, 2004.

[8] A recent Aide Memoire for the Minister of National Defence envisages the JSS as capable of providing 1,500 lane meters of equipment carrying capacity below decks plus another 1,000 lane meter equivalent of space on the upper deck if containers are stacked two high and if the helicopter hanger and deck are used to store equipment in lieu of helicopters. Aide Memoire for MND, "Joint Support Ship – Capabilities" (4 March 2004).

[9] See the 2003 update of the 1998 Foreign Policy White Paper. Australia, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *Advancing the National Interest: Australia's Foreign and Trade Policy White Paper* (February 2003)

[10] Australia, Department of Defence, *The White Paper: Defence 2000 – Our Future Defence Force*

[11]These include the acquisition of six dedicated minehunters (of which four will be kept in the active fleet and two in reserve), 12 fast patrol boats, the Global Hawk unmanned air surveillance vehicle and six airborne early warning and control system radar aircraft.

[12] The principal result of this was the disbanding of the Air Force's fighter force in 2000. The only fixed-wing combat aircraft remaining in the Royal New Zealand Air Force are its ageing P-3K maritime patrol aircraft.

[13]David Haglund "Are We the Isolationists? North American Isolationism in a Comparative Context" *International Journal* 58 (Winter 2002-03): 23

[14]Canada. Privy Council Office, *Securing an Open Society: Canada's National Security Policy* (April 2004) pp. 4-5

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